

Situating Postcolonial Trauma Studies

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... there is no unitary collective subject (such as the African self or the Indian self) but forms of inhabiting the world in which one tries to make the world one's own, or to find one's voice both within and outside the genres that become available in the descent to the everyday.

—Veena Das *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*, 216

I

In introducing this special issue of *Postcolonial Text* addressing “situating postcolonial trauma studies,” I want to work towards providing an indication of the subject matter and thematic concerns of the contributions. Before doing so I wish to develop a discussion of the theme, concerning in the main epistemological and ethical considerations; more specifically, how these considerations encompass entwinements between works of literature, theory, and social contextualization. Such considerations arise from the ways in which the work of the contributors came to provide interesting insights into not merely what is to be understood as “postcolonial trauma,” but more significantly how the parameters of such understanding come to be constituted through the labor of conceptual application, come to be “situated” as an encounter with the subject of research, an encounter informing and informed by confluences and divergences of intellectual exchange. An ethics of epistemological considerations thus takes place as an occasion or juncture where and when the subject of research responds to both the conditions of its emergence and the ways in which its livelihood is critically addressed.

I should narrow down the parameters by which I address this emerging, varied, and differentiated field of research, concerning the study of trauma within the compass of postcolonial critique. My interest here is with literary fiction, or more generally narrative practices of cultural production. My focus, to be sure, hardly exhausts the terrain of postcolonial trauma studies, considering valuable research in sociological, psychological, political, economic, and juridical dimensions of trauma, violence, testimony, and witnessing in postcolony and settler geographies.

To be more specific, I want to focus on a particular problematic, concerning relational flows between works of literature and the social and imaginary circumstances of their production and engagement. This problematic of course is hardly new, and indeed is by no means restricted

to fields of literary research. It has to do with the almost proverbial question of context—historical, geographical, cultural, discursive, and social context. With respect to the study of trauma in postcolonial literature, the question of context becomes, it seems to me, more pressing, when we consider how trauma embodies existential experiences of atrocity and survival, of coping in the aftermath of personal and social disintegration, while disclosing the limits of narrative, reference, and representation. The question of context is all the more challenging when we acknowledge that people embody trauma as extremities of narrative, discursive, logical forms of articulation. Accordingly, my preoccupation is with how, in addressing trauma, the field of postcolonial literary studies gains a foothold on context, considering that literary research tends to be restricted to works of fiction, and thus cannot assume narrative to be a documentary representation of social experience and circumstance. This problematic is also challenging when we note a tendency to allegorize postcolonial fiction, whereby a literary text is assumed to either reflect its context, or else conform to ideal prophecies informed by generic classifications.

Such considerations have contemporary valence: in the current climate where postcolonial literary and cultural critics compete to denigrate the apparent Euro- and North American-centered formalist, discursive, and deconstructive preoccupations with “the text” (an argument spelled out by Edward Said in his work of the early 1980s), insisting on more social materialist and historical approaches, the advocacy of context tends to betray an empiricist assumption of a reflectionist analytic. Consequently, postcolonial novels—or else works of literature emerging from postcolony and settler geographies/temporalities and situated within the compass of postcolonial studies—come to be read as either social documents or allegories that bear either direct reference or less direct performative trajectories to history, geography, genealogy, and identity. In the process, what I shall be calling the real time and place of enunciation—whereby works of cultural production addressing and/or embodying traumatic impulses implicate and respond to terrains of social disintegration and modalities of social coping, often blurring any neat distinction between normality and abnormality—comes to be either underestimated or ignored.

This underestimation tends to elide an appreciation of how historical and social contexts encompass the production and engagement of narratives and stories as certain fields or distributions of social and political sensibility in which people inhabit and creatively engage a sense of social viability and capacity to undertake exchange with others. In other words, the ways in which works of cultural production themselves hermeneutically inhabit and traverse phenomenological modes of social exchange are often overlooked by a critical practice that elides the real time and place of enunciation. An ethical consideration of epistemology has first to recognize that works of cultural production already implicate—before they come to be critically addressed—*con/textural* circulations of

material and imaginative resources having some bearing on how people engage affective and intellectual capacities for social viability. Quite straightforwardly, this *real* concerns accompanying, supplementary practices of reading and review, commentary, translation, and stage adaptation, as well as critical assessment, by which a work of cultural production locates and extends, as well as traverses, its historical and social significance, its geographical and temporal range, its symbolic, material, and imaginary force.

The real time and place of enunciation, I want to argue, has critical purchase to the extent that it lies beyond analytical distinctions between referential and performative modes of critical assessment—straddling wavering tensions between Delphic prophecies of a text's performance and empiricist assumptions of its referential associations. This notion of beyond can be regarded in terms of Nietzsche's sense of "beyond good and evil," which is to say beyond the constitutive binary terms of an assumption of negativity, beyond their potentially recuperable significance as symbolic mandates. In respect to the question of context, the real involves specific distributions and circulations of narrative and story as social material practices negotiating embodied modes of political and aesthetic sensibilities, implicating modalities of identification and attachment. And yet such distributions also bear upon capacities for self-constitution and social viability, and have some bearing on how particular narrative patterns come to be publically acknowledged, culturally and socially constitutive.

As stated in the call for papers, Ella Shohat's situational, relational approach to Franz Fanon works to embed the significance of his preoccupations in the contexts in which his books are read, reviewed, translated, and adapted—in other words, in respect to the real time and place of their supplementary enunciation. I shall return to this relational approach after first considering the influence of Cathy Caruth, whose work is usually presented as inaugurating trauma as a theme for the humanities, mainly literary and cultural studies, especially with a meta-psychoanalytic bent. In respect to tensional, interwoven, and entangled relationships across and between referential and performative registers of association, this concerns her somewhat highly charged claim of a "crucial link between literature and theory" (*Unclaimed* 3). This link is related to her accompanying claim of historical reference arising from belated scenes in which trauma lingers, endures, persists as both a demand for narrative association and the impossibility of any adequate form of representation and historical closure. In closing I shall return to a presentation of the work of the contributors included in this issue.

II

Cathy Caruth's work on the literary and metapsychological compass of trauma, emerging from an academic environment of psychoanalytic and deconstructive criticism, makes an ethical claim to historical reference—a claim embedded in and emerging from the important research in Holocaust studies at Yale University. This ethical aspect of epistemology informs her influential monograph *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), as well as her edited volume, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995). Much referenced is her observation: “The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess” (*Trauma* 5). This link between trauma, reference, and history informs her chapter on Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*: “Through the notion of trauma, I will argue, we can understand that a rethinking of reference is aimed not at eliminating history but at resituating it in our understanding, that is, at precisely permitting *history* to arise where *immediate understanding* may not” (*Unclaimed* 11, Caruth's emphasis).

Caruth's oracular tone, charged with a peculiar, almost prophetic drive towards a Delphic revelation of history as that which may “arise” from the revenant weight of the immediate present (not merely the past), nevertheless claims the possibility, perhaps exigency, of a referential register. The seeming paradox, here, of history emerging through the tension between revelation and reference—a tension informing Freud's very late work on Moses, as well as Caruth's address to this work—somehow parallels the notion of trauma as both refusal of and demand for reference and narration, as both a symptom of history and a potential site for an account of history.

The quotations above are in another respect revealing, as their prodigious reference in the study of trauma literature implies an analogy or equivalence between an existential experience of trauma and its symptomatic reverberation in literary texts. They are also suggestive of Caruth's seemingly unproblematic appropriation of psychoanalytic categories to the study of literature and other works of cultural production. Accordingly, we can well ask if it is a question of “the traumatized,” or rather a work of cultural production by which traumatic dispositions are indexed, stylistically narrated as a scene of latency.

This appropriation is even more evident in Caruth's monograph, where she evokes Freud's occasional interest with works of literature to better outline the conceptual topographies of his psychoanalytic theory, to better outline the conceptual topographies of her critical literary practice. “If Freud turns to literature,” writes Caruth in her introduction to her monograph, “to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing.” Literature and psychoanalysis, it seems, converge at a specific intersection (which, for more than one reason, could well be

related to the adaptation of the mythic confrontation between Oedipus and the Sphinx). As Caruth goes on to immediately say: “And it is at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet” (*Unclaimed* 3).

More problematic for some of the critics, especially Ruth Leys (2000), is Caruth’s apparent literalized model of trauma, whereby through dissociation the resonance of traumatic shock has an afterlife because it remains unassimilated to narrative, conscious awareness and conventional social routine, apparently preserved as a pristine state of somatic experience: “...not experienced as it occurs,” the shock becomes “fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time.” For “the space of unconsciousness...is, paradoxically, precisely what preserves the event in its literality.” And again, to continue Caruth’s passage, the relationship between history and trauma is foregrounded: “For history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs, or to put it somewhat differently, that a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence” (*Unclaimed* 17-18).

For all the productive ambivalences and enigmatic insights informing Caruth’s critical language, her constant use of the term “precisely” always sounds a bit paradoxical. But more interestingly, her emphasis here, at least initially, is not so much on literary theory or criticism, but rather the “language of literature” itself. This “language,” of course, is entwined with variable circumstances of production and circulation of material and imaginary resources, implicating modalities of agency and social viability. But in the more restricted economy of Caruth’s preoccupations, she goes on to adapt Freud’s example of Torquato Tasso’s *Jerusalem Delivered* (first published in its collected form in 1581, translated into English in 1600), to demonstrate the “crucial link between literature and theory.” The stakes in reading and interpretation are high: “The example offered by the poetry of Tasso is indeed, in my interpretation, more than a literary example of a vaster psychoanalytic, or experiential, truth; the poetic story can be read, I will suggest, as a larger parable, both of the unarticulated implications of the theory of trauma in Freud’s writings and, beyond that, of the crucial link between literature and theory...” (*Unclaimed* 3).

I am dwelling on a by now well-worn critical response to Caruth’s work, and not only because of its valuable and significant influence on trauma studies for research in the humanities, but also because it helps me to articulate my argument for the study of trauma in respect to postcolonial critique. From the perspective of the latter, such a critique involves an acquaintance with historical circumstance and con/textures in which texts are embedded, and can be approached as products and patterns of hermeneutic inhabiting and dwelling. Besides other critiques of Caruth’s approach to the Tasso epic—whereby the thorny issue of identifying perpetrators and victims (between the characters Tancred and Clorinda) is highlighted (La Capra 182)—from a postcolonial/gender

perspective (see Novak) one could further mention the enormous influence of the epic on seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth-century cultural production (beginning almost immediately in post-Quattrocento painting, such as Domenico Tintoretto's canvas "Tancred Baptizing Clorinda," 1585). Accordingly, we could well ask to what extent Caruth's notion of historical reference emerging at the intersections of knowing and not-knowing, through an ethical demand to foreground the limits of knowing, gives us a chance to hear the voice of the "Pagan damsel" (Tasso 15) Clorinda as she fights against the Crusaders before her alterity (a white Ethiopian, according to Tasso) is recuperated by Tancred's chivalric and possessive impulses.

In respect to the real time and place of enunciation in which both Tasso and the style of *his* epic are embedded/embodied, one could simply ask why Tasso's aesthetic regime is compelled to identify Clorinda with a certain color of skin, why skin color was for his embodied hermeneutic sensibility significant. We can also ask why the recuperation of Clorinda necessitates her conversion to Christianity before her death, or else her reincarnation as a Christian after her death. In the epic we hear her voice mainly through Tancred's self-centered, masculinist investment in passion and romantic desire. This particular mode of enunciation came to work as a cultural pattern or epistemological inventory, hugely influential for chivalric romances in which the feminine comes to both subjectively and objectively define imaginative attachments and symbolic mandates proactively engaged as a desire for fulfillment, or else the fulfillment of desire, embodied as material and imaginary inventories of "the damsel in distress." This enunciative modality necessitates a recuperation of Clorinda's unstable alterity—as a sword-wielding pagan-Ethiopian warrior moving ambivalently between unstable identities of Christian and Muslim, masculine and feminine, pagan and damsel—to a recuperable register of stable identities, reaffirming the capacity of Tancred to situate romantic loss and yearning as the very basis of his heterosexually gendered masculinist desire for fulfillment.

In the more restricted economy of Caruth's and Freud's respective analyses, the story of Tancred and Clorinda becomes something like a parable or allegory of their particular theoretical concerns to outline the conceptual significance of trauma. The literary text, the work of cultural production, comes to be restricted as a site for the exigency of conceptual application. The real time and place of the epic's enunciation—its writing and publication, its ongoing reading, translation, review, interpretative engagement in literary criticism, painting, theatre—come to be sidelined. The question of the very capacity of the epic to be historically, proactively situated as a material and imaginary resource is passed over. Accordingly, we can well ask about the real time and place of enunciation in which Tasso's epic is relationally situated as a mode of address, implicating power and desire as productive, subjugating webs of social exchange, as well as the parameters in and through which Caruth situates the epic, or at least the story of Tancred and Clorinda, as a mode of critical address. In

other words, to critically consider the epistemological inventory by which works of cultural production hermeneutically inhabit and traverse phenomenological modes of social viability is overlooked by a critical practice that conveniently ignores the real time and place of its enunciation. This elision, as I shall try to demonstrate, is shared by both formalist and historicist literary and cultural criticism.

III

For my present purposes the self-referentiality of performative associations is not quite where the problematic lies, or at least not only where I want to situate the question of the value of Caruth's work for the study of postcolonial trauma literature and cultural production. A significant aspect of this problematic concerns how her work is mostly positioned negatively towards defining the epistemological, historical, geographical, narratological, and ethical parameters of postcolonial trauma studies. I want to somewhat go against the grain and suggest that her arguments are not only important for postcolonial trauma studies (as they obviously are, considering their prodigious reference), but that the negative valorization of her work, while providing critical and productive insights, nevertheless says something about the pitfalls of the reflectionist analytic often assumed by the postcolonial study of trauma literature. In a rather peculiar fashion this negative valorization of Caruth's work being too "textual," eliding the contours of political sensibilities in which literature is embedded, is somewhat misplaced, trumped by what often transpires as a failure to consider the productive tension by which literature and other practices of cultural production are both embedded in particular contexts and embody certain con/textural inventories influencing how such contexts are socially inhabited.

As I have suggested, there is an important ethical dimension to Caruth's work on trauma, one that comes to more compellingly situate intersections of knowing and not-knowing as modes of address to and from another, a relationship in which the limits of understanding and a self-referential episteme come to be critically foregrounded. To my mind, this ethical dimension is best represented in her chapter on the film *Hiroshima mon amour* (*Unclaimed*). In her discussion of the film she attempts to direct the formalist impulses of deconstructive critique towards the question of historical reference, without assuming a reflectionist analytic that serves in the main to transform works of cultural production into sociological documents, transcending the tension between the real time and place of enunciation and the fits, starts, and constitutive intervals in which the referential register of the story can at all come to be engaged.

This critical aspect of Caruth's work is noted by Anne Whitehead, who in her *Trauma Fiction* (2004) points out that Caruth's "insistence on the inherent belatedness of experience and understanding challenges the

notion of a straightforward textual referentiality” (13). More a question of force than form, the capacity of fiction to engage history encompasses a performative register: “Such a notion of history”, Whitehead continues, “implicitly repositions the relation between language and the world, so that the text shifts from a reflective mode—based on a position of self-awareness and self-understanding—to a performative act, in which the text becomes imbricated in our attempts to perceive and understand the world around us.” This “performative act” comes to inform the critical compass and ethical scope of addressing a work of trauma fiction. So that rather than simply apply a set of concepts or else methodological procedure to a literary work, Whitehead foregrounds an ethical exigency she articulates as “a resonance between theory and literature in which each speaks to and addresses the other” (4)—a notion influenced by Caruth’s sense of a “crucial link between literature and theory.”

The practical significance of Whitehead’s application of the performative works to productively question any uncritical assumption of a reflectionist analytic, and has a capacity to renew an ethical consideration of historical reference and representation. And yet to eschew a critical awareness of how the very tension between referential and performative registers of association—implicating socially embodied modalities of negotiating temporal and spatial relationships between narrative and story—has some bearing on the maintenance of social viability and political sensibility, tends to mythologize the work of fiction, thus rendering it a site of a transcendence of history. In the process, it becomes difficult to critically approach history and geography as sites or environments of proactive engagements with and arguments over the wavering, aberrant significance of the work of literature. The very hermeneutical labors and phenomenological impulses of the work—the tension between its embeddedness in history and its proactive embodiment as registers of imaginary attachment and symbolic identifications—becomes answerable only to the critic.

As an example of the pitfalls of this Delphic tenor I want to briefly mention a very recent critical application of a performative approach to postcolonial fiction, published in the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Literature and Trauma Studies* (2012). In his essay for this volume, “Surviving Time: Trauma, Tragedy, and the Postcolonial Novel,” Samuel Durrant undertakes a critical reading of Chinua Achebe’s novel *Things Fall Apart*, first published in 1958. Achebe, of course, has in his lectures and critical writings provided compelling discussions of the conflictual relationship between the literary and history, the writer and community (a concern that informs his creative writing), from which Durrant to some extent draws.

Addressing Achebe’s novel, Durrant focuses on its capacity to situate a tragic temporality over and above the stuttering temporality of trauma. Accordingly, Achebe’s narrative works to performatively give the haunting of traumatic temporality a historical destiny, so that the anesthetic fall into time is transformed into an analeptic redemption of

catastrophe, construed through the fracturing force of the tragic. Durrant calls this a “performative effect” (rather than Whitehead’s notion of a “performative act,” although Durrant does not reference Whitehead). As he goes on to immediately explain: “to retell history as prophetically foretold is to recover an indigenous temporality and thus reconstitute the very community that has fallen apart” (96-97). In other words, the performative effect works not only as a mode of recovery, but delivers a sense of historical reconciliation by foregrounding fracture and discontinuity.

In adapting Nietzsche’s early book on tragedy, Durrant nevertheless skirts an epistemic sense of indigeneity as a recovery of an absent (not lost) unity, though always already implicating other modes of historical rupture, ultimately construed through the “catastrophic history of colonization,” or else what can be otherwise observed as a decolonizing historiography of catastrophe. For Durrant, this recovery cannot be achieved through historical reference, but rather must give rupture itself a destiny through the performance of “a form of *narrative agency*” (101, Durrant’s emphasis). Critical appraisal of this performative effect is possible only to the extent that the narrative is not assumed to be a document of history: “...Achebe here makes no claim to recovering what actually happened. What is vital is not historical verisimilitude but the *creation* of a memory that imbues his people’s survival with a meaning—and indeed interpolates them *as a people*” (102, Durrant’s emphasis).

In respect to this performative register, Durrant manages to demonstrate how the redemptive impulses of Achebe’s narrative do not assume a mythical temporal trajectory. Rather, the redemptive capacity of the narrative, its performative effect in “bridging the rupture between precolonial past and postcolonial present” (99), comes to be transformative, which is to say foregrounds ruptured temporalities, or else the temporality of ruptures, as an integral aspect of the redemption of history. But my problem with this approach is that while Durrant references some of Achebe’s own comments on his novel to further his performative reading, or else his reading of performativity, the referential register comes to be somewhat hollowed out, affirmed only by the rhetorical refrain of its repetition.

For Durrant Achebe’s novel both marks and constitutes a rupture. And while, for Durrant, the novel cannot be approached according to a particular tradition, it nevertheless has some bearing on the emergence of a community. *Things Fall Apart* is thus regarded not as “part of a purely literary tradition, but rather as a particular mode of experience, an ecstatic rite of identification in which *Achebe’s African contemporaries* become *more fully themselves* only by reenacting their own severance from themselves in Okonkwo’s involuntary acts of disinheritance” (110, my emphasis). And further, “...it may be possible for *Achebe’s contemporaries* to receive Okonkwo’s corpse as the image of their own estrangement from the sacred ways of their ancestors. The repetition of the moment of severance paradoxically allows *Achebe’s readers* to reconnect

with themselves..." (110-111, my emphasis). In trying myself to hear the voice of "Achebe's readers" or "contemporaries"—to somehow gain a sense of this "reconnection"—I wonder if it would be helpful to track how *Things Fall Apart* has been reviewed and discussed by "Achebe's African contemporaries," by his "readers."¹

I want to make, then, the rather banal, though significant point that while Durrant enlists a number of important theorists to further clarify his argument, there are almost no references to the engagement of the novel by "Achebe's African contemporaries." Consequently, the collective "we" that Durrant interpolates in his essay remain largely indistinct. The jagged real time and place of the novel's enunciation, its relational situation as a site of hermeneutic embeddedness and phenomenal inhabiting, becomes answerable only to the Delphic prophecy of "a performative effect" that has lost any connection to the novel's multiple and relational registers, to the way in which it circulates in and across time and geography as a site of response.

IV

It should be clear by now that my notion of a referential register has less to do with a reflectionist assumption of a work's realist impulses than with the way in which it comes to be affirmed as a site of response—what I have been calling the real time and place of a work's reading and review, translation, and commentary—all of which work to situate the work in particular intellectual, social, and aesthetic distributions of sensibility as practices of response. While a concentration on the performative is undoubtedly fruitful, if the postcolonial study of trauma is to be situated in respect to an ethical concern, then the resonance of the performative has always to be set in tension to historical exigencies with which such resonances are entangled and entwined. On the other hand, as I have suggested, a reflectionist analytic serves also to transcend this tension, in an expectation and/or epistemological assumption of empirical verisimilitude.

To further clarify, I want to discuss the introduction to a recent volume of essays—*The Splintered Glass: Facets of Trauma in the Post-Colony and Beyond* (2011). This volume includes a number of excellent essays addressing in the main the literary compass and ethical purchase of literature encompassing trauma, articulating significant engagements with the critical literature. Having myself an ongoing interest in cultural production as sites of political and ethical sensibility and exchange in Australia, it is encouraging to see a whole section on "The Australian Apology and Trauma of Unbelonging," with compelling chapters on novels by Richard Flanagan, Andrew McGahan, Tim Winton, and Janette Turner Hospital (a further chapter on Kim Scott's *True Country* (1993) or *Benang: From the Heart* (1999), Sally Morgan's *My Place* (1987), or

indeed Gail Jones' *Sorry* (2008), among others, would have been interesting). Also compelling are chapters that address autobiography, whose aberrant overlapping with fiction has in my view to be further wrested from the regimented prescriptions of a postmodernist critique that tends to remain largely Euro-American-centered—a particular mode of critique whose epistemological inventory immanently embodies specific temporalizing trajectories.

In their introduction the editors Dolores Herrero and Sonia Baelo-Allué start by setting out the terms by which a psychoanalytic approach can be complemented by sociological studies of trauma, so as to gain better insight into historical and social contexts in which works of fiction are embedded. As they argue, the “focus on an individual/psychological perspective may pose the danger of separating facts from their causes, thus blurring the importance of the historical and social context, which is particularly relevant in postcolonial trauma narratives” (xi). Critically borrowing from rather than rejecting the work of Caruth, as well as the work of significant others, the editors develop a notion of “cultural trauma” so as to think of trauma not merely as a precipitating event but also as a lingering social and psychological condition—what Laura Brown has productively called “insidious trauma,”² or what Kai Erikson defines as a circumstance in which an “event becomes a condition.”³ And yet, as the editors go on to suggest, cultural trauma should not be a purely theoretical exercise, but engage “the experiences of real people,” so that in “dealing with postcolonial trauma fiction...theoretical abstractions should be combined with facts...” (xiv).

The editors note a reliance on what they call “Western theoretical models,” although argue for a modification when addressing other cultures and contexts, enlisting the work of Franz Fanon to demonstrate how the psychological and social can be combined to adequately address trauma as a lingering condition. I will return to the postcolonial reception of Fanon in a moment, but want to further address the critical purchase of the editors’ claim to “facts” and “social context,” and “the danger of separating facts from causes” (xi). For while they provide an approach that manages not to simply dismiss the work of Caruth in respect to psychoanalytic and deconstructive impulses (although I have some problems with regarding Derrida’s work, as compelling as it is, as a critique of “the impact of colonialism and its deforming effects” [xviii]), the difficulty arises around a rather empiricist notion of “facts,” which tends to uncritically endorse a reflectionist analytic. This empiricist assumption becomes especially problematic as they go on to introduce the essays of the volume. Again, it is quite valuable to distinguish between fragmented and realist narratives (a significant distinction for my own research in Lebanon, 2012), and argue that both are valid for the study of postcolonial trauma fiction, so as to maintain “an ‘ethical’ attitude towards the specific cultural and political contexts out of which these texts emerged” (xxii). And yet how are these texts, both experimental and

realist styles of narrative, to be regarded as “valid accounts of traumatic experiences?”

As Herrero and Baelo-Allué go on to introduce the chapters, they come to rely on the problematic terms “as reflected,” “as seen,” and “the representation” (xxiii) as conjunctions between fiction and context, and it becomes unclear whether trauma resides in the fiction or in the context, or else how it moves across and between registers of its social embeddedness and relational registers of its literary and critical embodiment; or in my terms, how lingering impulses of trauma resonate across and between referential and performative registers of association. Moreover, the inclusion of Australia as a “non-Western setting” suggests a rather debilitating binary opposition between the West and the Rest that serves more to homogenize geography into neat compartments of analysis, in a not so dissimilar fashion to area studies.

What, then, becomes problematic is not so much the credible insistence on social context, the argument for a consideration of the historical circumstances informing the productivity of a work of literature, but rather the expectation that the work can be approached as “a reflection” of such circumstances. Certainly, “trauma theory” can well provide a valuable contribution “in analyzing and understanding colonial traumas such as forced migration, sexual, racial and political violence, dispossession, segregation, genocide, and the intergenerational transmission of trauma,” particularly when its application undergoes some modification to “tackle other contexts and cultures” (xvii). And yet I wonder if this contribution requires a more responsive practice of inquiring into the historical, social, cultural, and political circumstance in which the gap between narrative and story is proactively negotiated and ambivalently inhabited. It is in this sense of considering the historical alignments and disalignments between referential and performative registers of association—in other words, what I have been calling the real time and place of the work’s enunciation (review, translation, critical discussion, theater adaptation, etc)—that may well prevent the work of literature from becoming either a reflection of social context or indeed a reflection of theory.

V

To speak, then, of a “crucial link between literature and theory” is to foreground relational vectors in which geography and history come to be entwined in various practices of association, in respect to irresolvable temporal and spatial tensions between narrative and story on the one hand, and literature and theory on the other. The very capacity to critically engage a work of fiction (the capacity to situate oneself as an addressee of the work and explore the gap between narrative and story, literature and theory) is embedded in various intersections of social, literary, cultural, or

politically inflected modalities of affiliation and convention. To be sure, to address what is designated as “postcolonial trauma studies” is also to constructively contribute to the significance of both *postcolonial* and *trauma*. And to think of how these terms come to be designated, *descriptively* set free from the labour of conceptual disclosure, is to consider the contours of their entwinement, in respect to the force of their historical, geographical, and ethical implications. It is to critically reflect on the epistemological inventories and normative fervour by which they come to be exchanged as conceptual currency. As Michael Rothberg has argued, in his efforts to discursively, historiographically, and geographically bridge holocaust and postcolonial studies as both comparative and incomparative interventions of critical inquiry, as a category “trauma often functions as the object of a competitive struggle, a form of cultural capital that bestows moral privileges” (87). This observation suggests, for example, that in foregrounding the real time and place of such privileges is to bring about some humility when considering how the study of literature can at all contribute to the practice of social justice, rather than moralizingly claim this contribution through its rhetorical refrain.

But as Rothberg has also suggested, in staking out the terrain of postcolonial trauma studies there has been a tendency to produce a non-relational clash of civilizations scenario that pits a notion of the west against the rest, the former marked by an apparent concentration on the individual that is unsuitable to the equally apparent collective experience of trauma in what are classified as non-western societies. This logic is framed by and informs a compulsive, though incapacitating binary opposition between the West and the Rest. Moreover, it tends to reproduce an Orientalist paradigm for which European characters are afforded personal characterization, while the “natives” are represented as an anonymous, nondescript background, inscrutable in their characterless comportment. In less thoughtful studies, trauma in the non-West is always collective, identified through the category of the *what*, the designation of a community, while in the West trauma is identified by the *who*, affording a personal sense of self-representation.

To my mind, I wonder if it is more productive to either be rid of the all too static terms individual and collective, or else redirect their conceptual purchase to include verbal registers of individualizing and collectivizing. In any case—to restrict my comments to my overall focus on narrative fiction—it would be more productive to consider how works of literature *con/texturalize* various affiliations in which individual and collective are plotted and designed in specific geographies, rather than limit the individual to the West and the collective to the Rest. Or at least take note of Chinua Achebe: “Does this mean then that among these people, the Igbo to take one example, the individual counts for nothing? Paradoxical as it may sound the answer is an emphatic ‘No’. The Igbo are second to none in their respect of the individual personality” (57). There can be no doubt, here, concerning Achebe’s assumption of his main

audience, in respect to the notion that this claim to individuality among the Igbo should sound “paradoxical.”

Then again, perhaps personal and public may be better options, considering the increasing circulation of narratives of witnessing and testimony, whereby personal stories come to be transported into and archived as publically accessible documents, contributing to circulations of public and political sensibility, often in the service of reconstituting nationalizing narratives of redemption and reconciliation. In this respect, personal and public can also be employed to trace the ways in which political advocacy and constituency, circulation and accessibility of material and imaginative resources, come to influence the constitution and representation of communities. Certainly the novel has always worked as a “distribution of the sensible” (Rancière), influencing sensibilities of the personal, public, and their relationships.

But to return to my preoccupations, in postcolonial studies and increasingly postcolonial trauma studies, the work of Franz Fanon has come to be positioned as providing an apparent non-Western approach by wresting trauma studies from its debilitating subject-centered episteme. *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (2004), as well as *Toward the African Revolution* (1988), have tended to be approached as conceptual currency exchanged between critics concerned with varying and very different emotional and intellectual geographies, varying historical trajectories of decolonization and postcolonial critique. Often pitted against the depoliticized tenor of Caruth’s work, Fanon’s has become prominent so as to question and off-set a North American and Euro-centered epistemic bias. And yet, as was stated in the call for papers for this special issue, considering how Fanon’s work moved and moves across and between Caribbean, European, and North African geographies, to what extent does it make sense to enlist his work to maintain a unique sense of postcolonial trauma studies as non-Western, which serves to assert a unique West? For example, the extent to which Fanon observed, experienced, and critically articulated differentiating registers of and relationships between a subjugated blackness and subjugating whiteness—how skin color itself comes to be invested with the signifiable force and phenomenal attributes of subjugation—in Paris, Martinique and the Antilles, and Algeria, may well be lost once his insights are domesticated to a standard set of conceptual currency. Moreover, this adaptation leads to a hollowing out of the anger, passion, resentment, care, and nurture informing the agonistic commitments of his existential and intellectual engagements.

In this vein, it is rather peculiar that this predominant approach restricts his work to a conceptual questioning of an apparent Western subject-centered bias, rather than a focus on the circumstances of Fanon’s critical writings, the jagged terrain of their real time and place of enunciation in Algeria, France, Martinique, and increasingly, in respect to the secondary literature adapting his work to address other geographies and temporalities. This approach relates to a serious lack of attention

within postcolonial trauma studies to Arab and Islamic majority demographics and geographies (Saunders and Aghaie; Sayigh). This lack of interest is also puzzling when it is recalled that Said's *Orientalism*, often identified as a founding text of postcolonial studies, or else colonial discourse analysis, was concerned in the main with the various intellectual and imaginary regimes in which Arab and Islamic geographies were reproduced as epistemological inventories of European and American knowledge.

For example, a recent special issue of the journal *Studies in the Novel* is devoted to the theme "Postcolonial Trauma Novels" (Craps and Buelens). While the introduction refers to Fanon's "classic example of insidious trauma due to systematic oppression and discrimination" (3), none of the following twelve essays address North African geographies, eschewing any consideration of the colonial, decolonizing, and postcolonial circumstances and related discursive articulations in which Fanon's work is empirically, phenomenally, and hermeneutically embedded. Consequently, the tensions informing the exigencies of the real time and place of both Fanon's work and its accompanying critical reading, review, translation, and commentary are rendered mute, reduced to a transportable assemblage of conceptual and/or methodological application. If, according to Homi Bhabha's 2004 Foreword to the reissued English edition of *The Wretched of the Earth*, "[t]he legacy of Fanon leaves *us* with questions; his virtual, verbal presence among *us* only provokes more questions" (x, my emphasis), then it could well be valuable to foreground the real time and place of enunciation in which the personal pronoun insinuates an abstract objective entity seemingly transcending modalities of sexuality and gender, race and class, ethnic and national dynamics. To his credit, Bhabha (in a refreshingly post-hybridizing mode of critique) manages to address precisely this problematic in his Foreword.

But towards situating trauma studies as a terrain for a more relational engagement of postcolonial studies, I want to evoke Ella Shohat's "situational" or "relational" approach to Fanon, which in part she describes as posing "questions about Fanon's choices of where, when, and in relation to what and whom he opens up or closes down his analogies and comparisons" (251). In Shohat's essay "Post-Fanon and the Colonial: A Situational Diagnosis" (herself employing, incidentally, a prefix with which she has tended to be critical), the impulses of Fanon's work are figured by subtitles marking off various intersections: "Between Discourses," "Between Communities," "Between Geographies," "Between Temporalities." This betweenness does not put into relief a third dimension of hybridity that normatively trumps and relieves the tension informing what in the process become recognizable binaries, but rather works to inhabit and respond to the tension itself, according to the productive ambivalences of Fanon's arguments and the resonance of their circumstantial responsiveness.

In Shohat's approach these trajectories come to include relational registers of various other identifications—Arab and Jew, Black, Negro,

Algerian Jew, Arab Jew, sexual and gendered implications of Man and Woman—all intersecting the black-white dichotomy that has tended to predominate in studies of Fanon’s work. In other words, with her situational approach Shohat manages to evoke the various intersections that to a large extent inform the constraining and enabling conditions, intellectual and existential, in which Fanon’s preoccupations are received, inventoried, and supplemented. Undertaking her own “situational diagnosis,” she argues that the black-white dichotomy does not exhaust the import of Fanon’s work: “...rather than discern only a single axis at a time...we could look for a multidirectional, multichronotopic set of axes” (258). Less interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary, this approach is rather “undisciplined,” though not because it decries and rejects the critical purchase of conceptual application, but rather because it works with two overlapping and entangled levels of inquiry, not so different, perhaps, to Said’s famous claim of what he called “contrapuntal.” For Shohat, relationality, if it is to be situated, has to juggle a double exigency: “relationality within Fanon’s work itself and relationality as a method of reading Fanon” (251).

To adapt the tenor and temper of Fanon’s work, steeped as it is in his relational mode of address, the real time and place of enunciation has always to emerge from the asymmetry between referential and performative registers of association. This relational approach involves an appreciation of how the work of literature that embodies traumatic inflections or indeed thematizes trauma has to accommodate not only a time but also a geography crisscrossed by a number of intersecting trails, implicating a certain splitting in the reception of a work of cultural production. Between the referential and performative, the social circumstance, personal experience, and conceptual inventory of trauma are embedded in and embodied by variable modalities and interpretative practices. The question of “the crucial link between literature and theory” requires some reflection on why, where, how, and for whom it is so crucial, if the question itself is not to exhaustively predetermine the performative refrain and referential gist of the answer.

VI

In what follows I have placed Irene Visser’s contribution first, not only because of her well-known work on trauma and literary studies, but also because in her introductory remarks she discusses the themes informing the call for papers for this special issue. Borrowing from the work of Luckhurst (2008), Visser speaks of relationality as “an intricate knot,” visualized by her use of a graphic, and argues that in respect to various registers encompassing conceptual application and narrative association, whatever “secret” trauma carries implicates varied, entangled modes of address. Consequently, the significance of trauma not only emerges in,

responds to, remains dependent on, graphic practices of its association, but has to be considered as a mode of application. As a research paradigm, trauma cannot be stabilized according to a predetermined field of theory, but is both embedded in and traverses relational accommodations between disciplines, geographies, histories, implicating flows of material and imaginary resources and the institutions directing their distribution and access. The literary production of fiction can be regarded as one particular site in which this application affords both creative and critical impulses. Titled “Entanglements of Trauma: Relationality and Toni Morrison’s *Home*,” Visser’s essay carefully weighs contemporary approaches to research in trauma studies, which informs her close reading of Morrison’s recent novel, especially in respect to what she refers to as “modes of healing and redress not currently privileged in trauma theory.”

In the introduction to her contribution, “Refugee Life Writing in Australia: Testimonios by Iranians,” Laetitia Nanquette evokes a sense of how the crucial link between literature and theory is impinged, if not interrupted by “an account of the historical and political contexts that have produced [the] genre” of testimonio in Australia—contexts that include media reports, parliamentary debates, and a growing body of academic research. Attentive to the physical conditions of detention and asylum Iranian refugees are relegated to, in her discussion Nanquette also considers how in the composition of their writing the refugees themselves reflect on the social relevance and cultural resonance of being identified as a refugee, an asylum-seeker. Pride and belonging come to inform how the subjects of the testimonios tell their stories. Trauma, here, extends from the actual experience of being in detention to a surrounding ethos in which detention is discursively regimented. Nanquette reflects on testimony as in part “an economy of speech” that works to interpolate the subject of asylum-seeker, and reads the testimonios in part as resistance to this regime. Entanglements between testimony, trauma, and narrative have some bearing on how it is not simply a question of “*what happened*,” Nanquette writes with emphasis, “but how one represents one’s experience for an audience,” considering the various institutional settings in which both speaker and audience are placed.

This essay is followed by Jeremy Patterson’s consideration of what he calls “linguistic trauma” in the poetry of Gaston Miron. Concentrating on the expressive force of poetry to embody traumatic impulses in its style of composition, Patterson also gives some attention to the historical context of Quebec that situates and embodies Miron’s engagement of poetic address. This historical context, Patterson demonstrates, does not lend itself to any neat distinction between colonizer and colonized, East and West, and consequently disrupts a postcolonial approach that would assume a more globalized import of these categories.

In “The Imprint of Partition on the Representation of Rape in Samina Ali’s *Madras on Rainy Days*,” Nazia Akhtar focusses her reading of the novel by considering how both the act and narrative association of rape constitute modes of suffering and patriarchal distributions of political

identification intent on purifying communal allegiances. Trauma comes to be understood as both an experience of atrocity, of “gendered violence,” and a lingering social condition having political and cultural implications. Akhtar impressively relates the novel as a site for diasporic and intergenerational flows of memory, while also considering affective intersections of political violence and personal intimacy. In her compelling words, she is concerned with how “the contemporary Hyderabad Muslim woman’s body stands in connection with the patriarchal, nationalist discourses that define the rhetoric of communalism.” Akhtar draws in part on Gayatri Spivak’s discussion of *sati* to demonstrate how Ali’s novel maps “a semiotic chain” in which “the maternal female body” accrues its signifiable force in the context of partition.

Also concentrating on the gendered implications of the feminine as both the body in pain (to evoke the work of Elaine Scarry) and a site for the assertion of masculinity, is Maja Milatovic’s contribution “Cycles of Violence: Ancestral Subtexts in Gayl Jones’ *Corregidora*.” In tracing the intergenerational threads of trauma across four generations of women in the novel, Milatovic makes the interesting suggestion that it is not only silence or the incapacity to articulate harrowing experiences that embodies traumatic impulses, but indeed the way in which stories passed on to succeeding generations accumulate static associations. With respect to narratives of slavery in North America and entangled impulses and/or trajectories of possessiveness, desire, racism, sexuality, and gender, trauma has thus to be regarded as relational, implicating asymmetrical modes of social exchange. Milatovic focuses on how, in respect to the narrative style and temporalizing tenor of *Corregidora*, intergenerational stories of racial, gendered, and sexual violence implicate “subtexts” immanently coursing through modes of embodiment.

In her approach to Assia Djebar’s *Algerian White*, Lobna Ben Salem considers violence and trauma as both thematic address and historical symptom of Djebar’s discomposing literary style. Concerned with the ravages of Algeria’s postcolonial history, Ben Salem suggests that this style is attuned to “a narrative of national trauma, making history seem latent and always in deferral.” While *Algerian White* encompasses a personal story of loss and bereavement, Algerian history resonates as the referential embodiment of this story, “an excavation and reconstruction of history,” as Ben Salem says. Trauma, here, does not only relate to a specific incidence or event, but also transpires as a lingering, immanent condition of the possibility of historical reference itself, always emerging from the attempt to configure violence and traumatic impulses as modes of address. As Ben Salem suggests, it is by situating herself as a responsive addressee of Algerian history that Djebar manages to “figure herself as a biographer, as a keeper of the trace.”

Notes

1. And I have to say that for Durrant to speak in this fashion without discussing, say, Achebe's "The Writer and his Community" (1990, first given as a lecture in 1984), is rather perplexing. Achebe: "Who is my community?...In the very different, wide-open, multicultural and highly volatile condition known as modern Nigeria, for example, can a writer even begin to know who his community is let alone devise strategies for relating to it"? (59). Twenty years earlier Achebe had remarked on how *Things Fall Apart* had over one year sold 20,000 copies in Nigeria, while only 800 copies in Britain, which would support Durrant's argument. But would the very question "Who is my community?" be both posed and answered in identical fashion over a span of twenty, thirty, or indeed fifty years—as the now late Achebe was well aware?

2. See her influential essay in Caruth, *Trauma*.

3. In his concern with what he calls "the geography of self" (159), Erikson suggests that there is nothing inherently traumatic about traumatic events, but rather with respect to how people survive, exchange, and react to such events, which is to say how people suffer and endure, access and put to work material and imaginative resources: "In such circumstances, traumatic experiences work their way so thoroughly into the grain of the affected community that they come to supply its prevailing mood and temper, dominate its imagery and its sense of self, govern the way its members relate to one another" (236-7). Fiction, stories reviewed, told and shared, or else narratives creatively drawing on stories told and shared, can be regarded as one of these resources. But the further point here is that Erikson's studies concern geographies that are often dismissed as "the West." Caruth includes an essay by Erikson in her edited volume *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*.

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